



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE MINUTES**

Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone

**MINUTES**

December 2, 2021, 5PM

Members present: Zoe Iacovino, Ona Ferguson, Emily Monea, Lucas Schaber, Beverly (Bev) Schwartz, Kat Rutkin, Jessica Lieberman, Meagan Benetti,

Members not present: Crystal Turner, William (Bill) White, Laura Pitone, Ben Echevarria

Staff attending: Anna Corning, Hope Williams, Collins Center - Elizabeth Corbo, Collins Center - Steve McGoldrick

Other attending: Carol, Klaus Schultz, David Booth, Jack Perenick, Pat Cain, Kate Kavanagh,

Meeting started at 5:05PM

**Decisions:**

1. Committee approved minutes from 11/18, with comment to take straw polls out of the decisions section.
  - a. Seven 5s
2. Committee approved the writing team to start drafting Article 1 of the Charter, noting the comments about flexibility of definitions and simplifying the language as much as possible.
  - a. Eight 5s.
3. Committee approved expanding municipal voting rights to include all non-citizen residents of Somerville who are otherwise eligible to vote.
  - a. Eight 5s
4. Committee approved for the writing team to draft language that defines eligible voters in Somerville municipal elections (term to be determined at a later date, depending on home rule petition status).
  - a. Seven 5s, One 4
5. Committee approves expanding municipal voting rights to include 16/17 year olds who are otherwise eligible to vote.
  - a. Seven 5s, One 4
6. Committee voted to not make a change to eligibility to run for municipal offices.
  - a. Seven 5s, One 4
7. Committee voted to table the option to recommend a study group to explore a change in eligibility requirements to run for office, this topic will be discussed in transition provisions.
  - a. Seven 5s, One 4

8. Committee voted to table the signature requirement discussion until the 12/16 meeting, once more information on Massachusetts General Law was gathered.
  - a. Eight 5s
9. Committee voted to keep the existing process if a tie occurs in a primary election, and to simplify language as much as possible.
  - a. Eight 5s

*The committee uses the Fist to Five method of voting, a technique for gauging consensus. Voting ranges from 0 to 5. The scale is: 0 - no way, 1 - major issues to be resolved now, 2 - minor issues to be resolved now, 3 - minor issues to be resolved later, 4 - comfortable with this as it is, 5 - love this and will champion it. 0-2 is considered a lack of consensus, while 3-5 is considered consensus.*

## NOTES

1. Welcome 5:03
  - a. Hope welcomed the committee and community members.
2. Approve 11/18 Minutes 5:05
  - a. **Meeting minutes from 11/18 were approved.**
3. Public Comment 5:05
  - a. Committee heard one public comment from David Booth in support of the change to allow all residents of Somerville to vote in municipal elections. He also commented on the amount of references in the current charter to men and those should be removed.
4. Deliberation Topic 1: Incorporations, Short Title, Definitions 5:08
  - a. Committee deliberated the exemplar incorporation, short title and definitions section, to create a baseline of agreed upon definitions. Hope emphasizes this is a starting point for the definitions and they might evolve as the committee makes additional decisions. There was a discussion regarding combining similar terms as much as possible for clarity. There was also a discussion regarding the multi-member body definition and to include an advisory committee/task force to that definition. Overall the committee wanted the writing team to start drafting this ASAP.
  - b. **Committee approved the writing team to start drafting Article 1 of the Charter, noting the comments above and simplifying the language as much as possible.**
    - i. **Eight 5s**
5. Deliberation Topic 2: Eligibility for Voting in Municipal Elections - Residents 5:29
  - a. Committee deliberated expanding municipal voting rights to include all non citizens who are currently ineligible to vote because of citizenship status. Hope reminded the committee that early this year the City Council unanimously approved a home rule petition yet to be submitted to the state legislature that would allow all non citizens to vote.

- i. Committee members discussed clarifying the process whether necessary to include in the charter in addition to the existing home rule petition, and the strategy regarding this process. Several committee members described their support for this change, and that it is a foundational issue for Somerville.
    - ii. A committee member brought up the significance of this change and the potential opposition from a specific population of Somerville. Several committee members referenced the alignment with the values statement.
  - b. Libby from the Collins Center spoke about the Charter approval process: there are two ways to submit the charter either allowing the legislature to make changes or to not make changes, if no changes are allowed they'll bump back to the city.
  - c. **Committee approved expanding municipal voting rights to include all non-citizen residents of Somerville, who are otherwise eligible to vote.**
    - i. **Eight 5s**
  - d. Committee members discussed the pros and cons regarding term usage between "municipal voter" and "local voter" in the Charter language, aligning the term with the home rule petition draft, and making it as clear as possible for individuals to understand.
  - e. **The committee did a straw poll vote regarding which term to use in the charter draft, Municipal Voter or Local Voter.**
    - i. **Municipal - 4; Local - 1**
  - f. Hope and Anna will ask the City Solicitor and City Council for the reason for using the term "local voter" in the drafted Home Rule petition language.
  - g. **Committee approved the writing team to draft language that defines eligible voters in Somerville municipal elections (term to be determined at a later date, depending on home rule petition status).**
    - i. **Seven 5s, One 4**
- 6. Deliberation Topic 3: Eligibility for Voting in Municipal Elections - 16/17 Year Olds 5:50
  - a. Committee deliberated expanding municipal voting rights to include 16 and 17 year olds who are currently ineligible to vote solely because of age. Several committee members brought up the alignment with the values statement, the long term positive impacts on voting starting, and the value it brings to young people.
  - b. **Committee approved expanding municipal voting rights to include 16/17 year olds who are otherwise eligible.**
    - i. **Seven 5s, One 4**
- 7. Deliberation Topic 4: Eligibility for Running in Municipal Elections - Residents 6:05
  - a. Committee deliberated expanding eligibility to run for municipal elections. Hope explained the impact the above decisions would have on the current eligibility requirements. Committee members brought up concerns regarding employment eligibility, need for additional research, and the possibility of recommending a study group to explore the change.
  - b. **Committee voted to not make a change to eligibility to run for municipal offices.**
    - i. **Seven 5s, One 4**

- c. Committee voted to table the option to recommend a study group to explore a change in eligibility requirements to run for office, this topic will be discussed in transition provisions.
    - i. Seven 5s, One 4
8. Deliberation Topic 5: Signature Requirements for Ballots 6:15
  - a. Committee deliberated if signature requirements to get on a ballot for city office should be included in the charter. Committee members discussed the inclusion of signature requirements in charters in other municipalities, committee members also brought up community feedback that emphasized reducing barriers to entry as much as possible. Other committee members discussed including signature requirements in the charter to reduce the chance of having higher barriers to entry.
  - b. The Collins Center brought up a point regarding if signature requirements aren't defined in a Charter state law would overrule city ordinance.
  - c. **Committee voted to table the signature requirement discussion until the 12/16 meeting, once more information on Massachusetts General Law was gathered.**
    - i. Eight 5s
9. Deliberation Topic 6: Tie Election Process 6:35
  - a. **Committee voted to keep the existing process if a tie occurs in a primary election, and to simplify language as much as possible.**
    - i. Eight 5s
10. Writing Group - Draft Update 6:50
  - a. Committee discussed the drafted language the working group has drafted thus far. Committee members shared their support for the work done, mentioned ensuring the structure between Articles is similar would make it more clear.
11. Closing:
  - a. Hope thanked everyone, and asked since we had a few minutes left folks share any questions they want answered regarding alternative voting systems as that is a topic for the 12/16 meeting.